Scan your options

BACK SCANS AND OPIOIDS CAN CAUSE HARM

What are my options?

Not everyone needs a scan or opioids

This is important to know, because taking opioids or having a scan that you did not need can cause harm (see next page). This leaflet contains information about when you might need a back scan and/or opioid, and when you should try other options first. Expert doctors will determine this during a detailed clinical examination.

Things to look out for

You may need a scan if you have

- a temperature or fever
- unusual changes going to the toilet
- unusual numbness around your bottom
- cancer
- recent infection or use of recreational drugs
- inability to move legs or feet

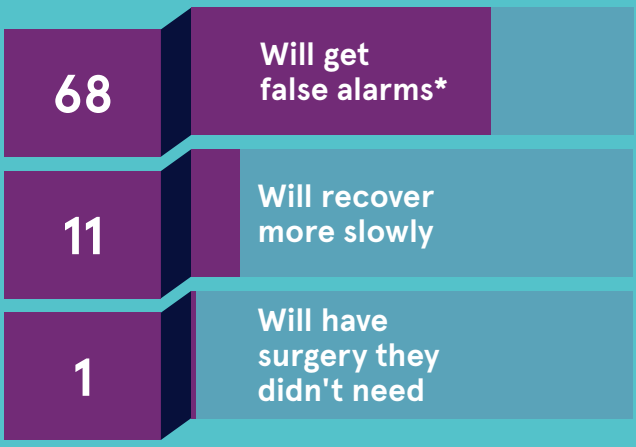
Common back pain

The following symptoms do not generally require a back scan

- spasms
- severe back pain

Why you should scan your options, not your back

On average, for every 100 people with common low back pain who have a scan:



The remainder may be no worse off, but they will experience no long-term benefit from having the scan.

* A false alarm is a scan result that seems serious (e.g.'disc bulge') but is common in healthy people without back pain. Many people get a false alarm on their scan results. This can lead to unnecessary surgery and other treatments that don't help.

Get back to better

Back pain improves on its own

Expert doctors recommend trying some of the options below to manage your pain in the short term.

Gentle movement

Use heat eg. hot water bottle or wheat pack

Don't rest for too long

Don't use strong medications like opioids (e.g. Endone)

Give yourself time. Many recover in 2-4 weeks

Some over-the-counter medications can help

“Back scans often don't find the cause of back pain or change your treatment. Your doctor will make a thorough assessment and discuss your options with you."

Professor Rachelle Buchbinder,
Rheumatologist

“Opioids like Endone don't help for back pain in the long term. Ask your doctor what the best pain relief options are for you at home.”

Professor Ian Harris,
Orthopaedic Surgeon

Still unsure?

When you talk to a doctor, ask:

1. **Do I really need a scan or opioids?**
2. **What are the risks?**
3. **Are there simpler/safer options?**
4. **What happens if I don't have a scan or take opioids?**

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